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"CRITICS."

WILSON DE MEZA.

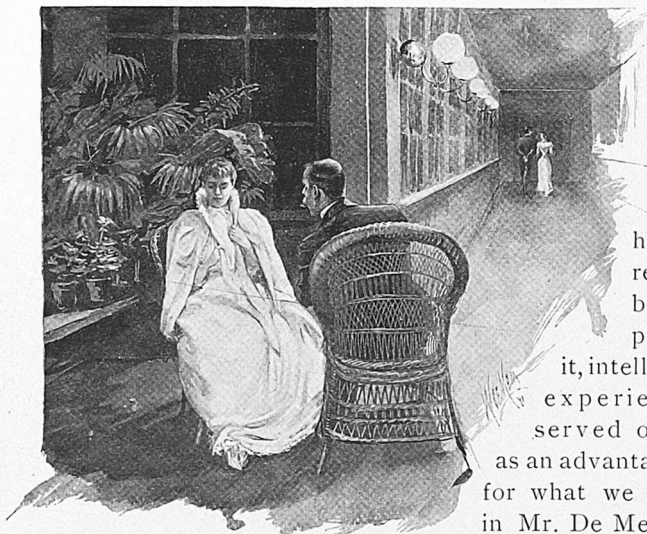
BY FRANK FOWLER.

(With representative examples of the deceased artist's work.)

AMERICAN illustration as it stands to-day is perhaps the most potent proof of the advance our art has made within the past fifteen years. In technical address, in the skill with which the various mediums of black and white are now employed by our artists of the press, we easily hold our own with the most brilliant craftsmen abroad.

It is not, however, only on the side of execution that we have so greatly progressed. In the more intellectual matter of character, of rescuing from oblivion rapidly disappearing types, and of defining the many phases of our complex civilization, the American illustrator of to-day is accomplishing wonders.

The man with whom this deals, whose untimely death at a period when his talents seemed to have reached their readiest and most delightful play, was one whose temperament revealed a rare distinction. Studying in Paris under Boulanger and Lefèvre, Mr. De Meza's first essay in art was in the branch of portraiture. In the French schools he had acquired an effective method which was of the greatest value to him when finally he directed his attention to illustrative draw-



"THE HOTEL VERANDA."

other men in the same field is, perhaps, the note of intelligence beyond the merely technical, that is sure to be the property of him who has some knowledge of the learned professions outside of the one he is following.

Mr. De Meza's work also brings one into an atmosphere where good breeding reigns. His charming women, lovely girls, and well-groomed men are not simply people who have donned good clothes in order to figure as the *dramatis personæ* of some social function or incident in romance. His women have about them the charm which comes only from a fine habit of life, his

ing; for mastery of material and readiness of execution are nowhere more needed than in the regularly recurring work of the illustrator.

Before seriously devoting himself to art, Mr. De Meza had studied civil engineering and read law, so that by the time he began to depict life in its various phases he had already touched it, intellectually, at several points. This

experience served only as an advantage; for what we find in Mr. De Meza's work in distinction from that of many



"A REQUIEM IN MEMORIAM."



"IN THE BROAD LIGHT AT THE WINDOW."

men are fellows who have good traditions behind them, and we know that the lovely girls they talk to are safe, even though their chaperons should fail in vigilance. These girls themselves, indeed, are of a sweetness and serenity that inspire chivalry; and it would seem that in their presence nothing unmannerly could quite exist.

Now a quality of this kind in illustrative art is as rare as it is delightful, and De Meza distinctly gave us this. Other illustrators may show greater command of their material,



"DAISY WAS DRIVING WITH ONE HAND."

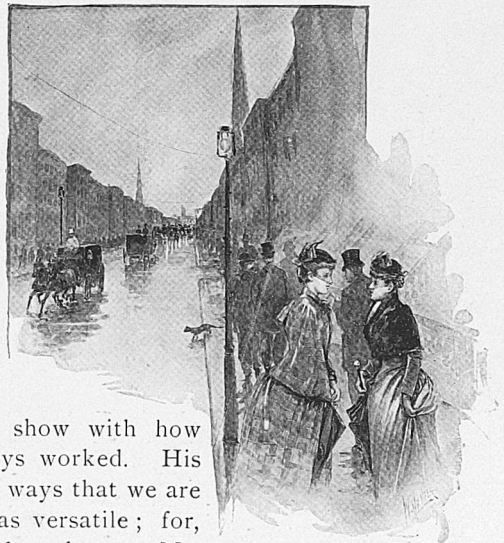
brushwork may be freer, handling in pen and ink more sure; but the indefinable charm that comes from right feeling is too often lacking, while with De Meza it is always there. I am tempted to emphasize the air of refinement and distinction in this artist's work, as there is so constant a call for it from the illustrators of to-day, and with but a few exceptions, it seems so little responded to in kind.

It is not enough to dress a model in fine things and call him fine. If it be necessary to resort to such aids, and it surely is, the artist has a responsibility beyond the graphic reproduction of the person before him. A model in a dress coat is not exactly the type one meets at a reception at the Embassy, or at a diplomatic dinner. The character and bearing of those who go yachting in the Mediterranean appear something different from that which is paid for at so much an hour for standing or sitting in smart clothes in a studio. Mr. De Meza, in common with other artists, had this hard fact to contend with, but he also appreciated that there was an intellectual as well as a technical side to art. In this case good form is more than clothes, and style more than fine raiment. I have heard laymen protest against

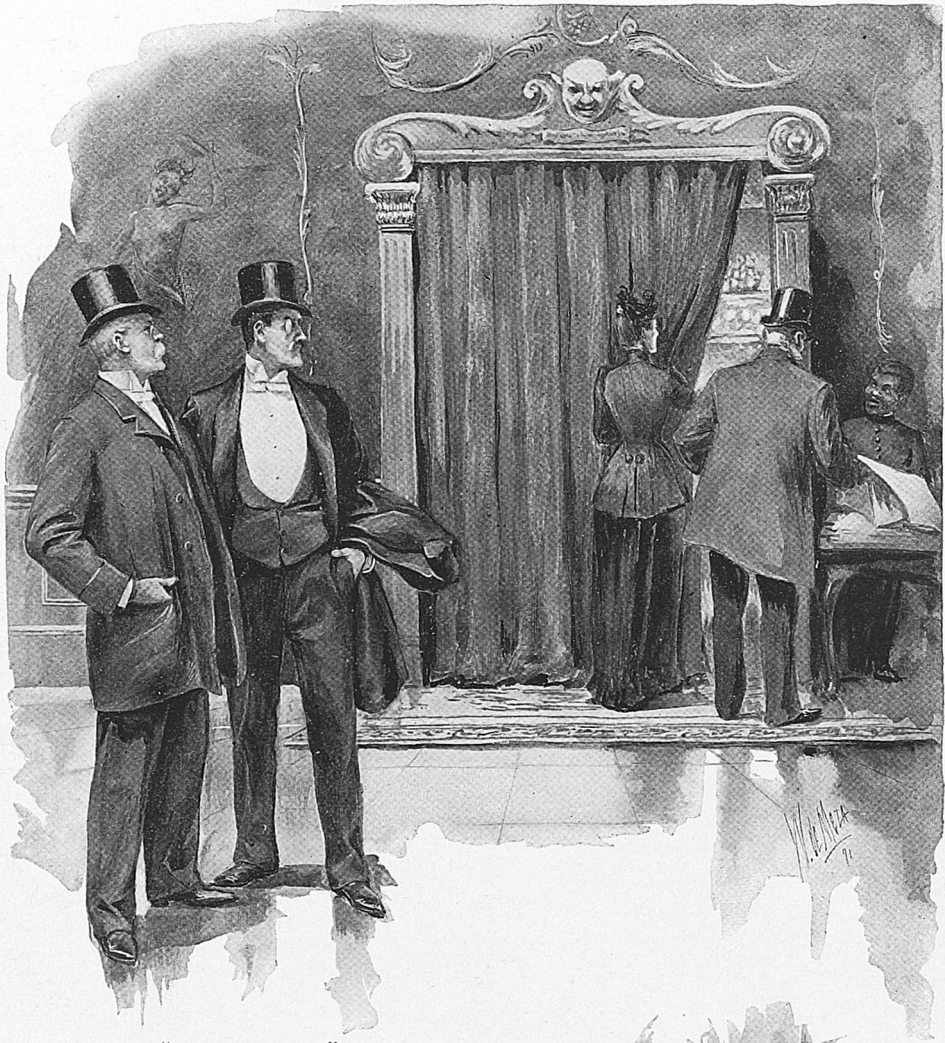


"FIVE O'CLOCK TEA."

representations of social life, where the work was above reproach, but where the whole tone was bourgeois. Mr. De Meza was fortunately not one to be reproached in the matter of taste. He had also an adequate command of his medium, and has given us sunny and effective studies of out-door life that show with how faithful a reference to nature he always worked. His pencil was employed in such a variety of ways that we are safe in speaking of his artistic talent as versatile; for, beside the society scenes by which he is best known, Mr.



"A FAVORITE THOROUGHFARE."



"BEFORE THE PLAY."

De Meza has embellished and illustrated several books for children, where the drawings were made by him on the stone. These books not only show a decorative sense, but, better still for their purpose, a delicate and charming sympathy with the whims and fancies of child life.

Work on the New York Ledger, in most of the leading magazines, in Life, and latterly in The Cosmopolitan, make up the sum of what this spirited young man has left of artistic effort; while quite recently, as though to emphasize the versatility of his gifts, Mr. De Meza published a story of



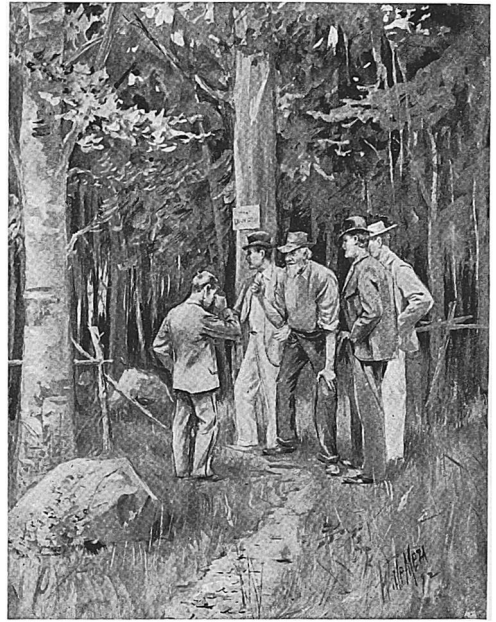
"MISS ENDOR WAS WEeping."

such force and interest that it has attracted the attention and received the approbation of one of the foremost of our writers and critics. Throughout this story the alert sensibility of an artist is clearly visible, and the interest of the work itself is enhanced by the graceful drawings with which he has graphically illustrated the text. Of talents like these it would perhaps have not been difficult to predict still finer things. Enough has been said, however, to show how peculiarly fitted this artist was for the work he had chosen. As a tribute to Mr. De Meza's power of will and tenacity of purpose, it may not be out of place to mention the fact that most of the work recorded here he accomplished while handicapped by great bodily infirmity. By taste and breeding he seemed naturally the

graphic interpreter of social life, and this side of illustrative art has lost in him a singularly refined and distinguished delineator.

NOTE.—The late Wilson De Meza was born in Tarrytown, N. Y., in 1857, and after a collegiate course at Lehigh he came to New York.

In 1883 Mr. De Meza went to Paris, and in 1885 exhibited his first important picture in the Salon. About five months ago Mr. De Meza was stricken with consumption, and died at Lakewood, N. J., on April 27th. Much of the earliest work of Mr. De Meza was done for Mr. J. A. Mitchell of Life, and several of the characteristic illustrations here reproduced were made for that clever periodical. Later the artist gave his efforts to the enrichment of The Cosmopolitan Magazine, through the courtesy of whose proprietor, Mr. John Brisben Walker, we are enabled to republish a series of recent drawings executed by the dead draughtsman.—ED.



"LOST IN THE WOODS."



"A DECLARATION OF LOVE."